

Lake Bluff, IL - With gas prices continuing to edge towards three dollars a gallon, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) outlined four key pieces of legislation needed to help lower fuel costs.

Kirk is supporting legislation to end fuel monopolies, extend tax credits for the purchase of hybrid vehicles, expand U.S. refineries and require an increase in the fuel economy of cars sold in this country. Kirk's call for action comes as the U.S. House of Representatives prepares to take up a major energy bill. Joining Kirk to promote the use of alternative fuels and hybrid vehicles were Doug Dittrich, GM Regional Sales Manager responsible for Government and Alternative Fuel Vehicle Sales and Dr. Jim Miller, Associate Director Chemical Technologies Division, Argonne National Laboratories.

"We need to take proactive steps to reduce our dependency on foreign oil, maximize fuel efficiency on the road, develop alternative fuel sources and crack down on unfair business practices," said Congressman Kirk at a grant presentation ceremony in Lake Bluff. "The price of gas is too high and will continue to rise if we do not act soon."

The legislation Kirk is sponsoring would restore flexibility in America's gasoline market. Federal and state regulations divide the nation between 16 different types of gasoline blends which cannot be swapped or sold in other parts of the country. These regulations inadvertently created local gasoline monopolies that charge more for gas. The various fuel formulations are often referred to as "boutique fuels." Chicagoland's supply problems with its unique blend (called RFG II) triggered a 22 cent increase in 2002. The legislation (H.R. 1493) will reduce the number of "boutique fuels" required, breaking a number of the fuel monopolies.

"Over time, the federal government should move the nation to a single standard, clean-burning gasoline. This will allow us to meet environmental standards while breaking local fuel monopolies," said Kirk.

Kirk is also sponsoring legislation that would extend the tax credit for hybrid vehicle owners due to expire in 2006. The law (H.R. 626) would also provide incentives for innovations in hybrid conversion technology.

Dr. Jim Miller of Argonne National Laboratories spoke about advances made in hybrid technology and demonstrated how the technology works. Honda and Toyota first introduced hybrid engine vehicles to the market that still require the use of gasoline, but travel far more miles per gallon than an engine solely operating on gasoline. Ford Motor Company equipped its Ford Escape and Ford Explorer with hybrid engines this year, the first auto maker to bring an SUV hybrid to market. As Ford builds hybrid family cars, dealers on the North Shore cannot keep them in stock. Sessler Ford in Libertyville currently has a long waiting list for the Ford Escape Hybrid.

Alternative fuels are another way to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil while also protecting our environment. Doug Dittrich promoted the use of E85, fuel that combines regular gasoline with ethanol. Ethanol is a renewable, clean-burning fuel that reduces sulfur and aromatic hydrocarbons for improved exhaust emissions performance. E85 fuel burns 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent petroleum. General Motors is currently the only car manufacturer selling E85 capable vehicles to the public including its Chevy Tahoe and Chevy Avalanche. E85 fuel reduces petroleum demands and lowers the cost of gasoline.

On average, E85 fuel sells for 20 cents less than regular unleaded gasoline in Illinois and up to 60 cents cheaper in states like Minnesota and North Dakota that heavily promote the fuel. Although there are a limited number of gas stations selling E85 fuels in the Chicago area, 100 more gas stations in Illinois will be selling E85 fuel year's end.

Kirk also presented a ceremonial check for \$800,000 to the Village of Lake Bluff to pay for the Phase 1 Study of the U.S. Route 41/Illinois Route 176 interchange improvement project. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, Kirk secured the funding from the Federal Highway Administration as part of the 2005 Appropriations Bill. The U.S. Route 41 and Illinois Route 176 interchange reconstruction will replace the current interchange configuration with a single point diamond interchange, a design that can safely move large amounts of traffic through a small amount of space. Joining Kirk to accept the check were Christine Letchinger, Lake Bluff Village President-elect and Kent Street, Lake Bluff Village Administrator.

"The Route 41/Route 176 interchange is a traffic nightmare during rush hour and has long been considered a dangerous interchange," said Kirk. "By reconstructing the exit and entrance ramps off of Route 41, traffic gridlock will be significantly reduced, property values will rise and area businesses will benefit."

Kirk closed the event by highlighting suburban mass transit expansion currently underway. Double tracking of Metra's North-Central line will be completed in December, increasing the

number of trains carrying commuters from six to 14. This will pull thousands of cars off the highways. Passage of the Federal Transportation Bill expected this summer will authorize funding for Metra's new STAR line giving commuters in the northwest suburbs rail service and access to O'Hare International Airport for the first time.

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